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ABSTRACT

This document provides an overview of the student absentee problem in Canada. It extrapolates the principles and components from the vast range of intervention strategies and projects, and offers a strategy for improving school attendance. Literature on absenteeism written after 1985 demonstrates a shift of focus from the student as truant to the school as part of both the problem and the solution. Four major principles are necessary to any successful intervention--awareness, change in perspectives, early intervention, and cooperation and involvement. Components of an intervention include developing and implementing attendance policies; monitoring, tracking, and recording; getting parents involved; providing counseling and guidance; and providing relevant curriculum or alternative programs. Research shows that programs implemented as schoolwide improvements have consistently been successful in reducing attendance problems. Effective schools are student-centered and operate as: a caring institutional and functional community, a community organization, an experimenter and risk-taker, and a team. Provincial governments and school boards should provide additional resources, research opportunities, comprehensive planning, leadership in curriculum development and organization, and support for school-based initiatives. Data (half of the document) are also provided on compulsory attendance in Canada (age limits, exemptions, and enforcement--attendance offices or counselors, sanctions against parents by province/territory, sanctions against students, and limits for attending kindergarten). Six tables and a recommended reading list are included. (LMI)

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IMPROVING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Responsibility and Challenge

Austin J. Harte

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About the Author

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About the Report

This report provides a summary of 1985-93 literature on school non-attendance and attendance, its correlates and causes and the identification of intervention strategies to improve school attendance A summary of Canadian school attendance legislation is also included.

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Improving School Attendance:

Responsibility and Challenge

Introduction

Absenteeism is a serious problem. The literature on school attendance and non-attendance over the past eight years details numerous and varied studies with sometimes dubious, if not conflicting, results. The literature also outlines a variety of strategies to combat this problem. Statistics interspersed throughout reports and articles attest to the seriousness of absenteeism and, since the 1970s, it has plagued schools to the point where it is considered to be one of the most serious problems facing North American schools today.

Absenteeism continues to have a direct, negative affect on student achievement, promotion, graduation, self-esteem, and employment potential. And, of course, the attendance rate directly affects the quality of the school climate, the delivery of instruction and the relationship between members of the school and the community.

Patterns or habits that begin in the school often continue into adulthood. Truants have been found to have less well-developed academic skills, hold lower status jobs, have more unstable job histories, experience higher levels of anti-social behaviour and substance abuse and, more frequently than non-truants, have criminal records.

Material on attendance legislation was requested from every Ministry or Department of Education and was verified by the Departments of Justice in each province or territory.

Initially the report was to examine "correlates or causes of non-attendance," but the literature was just as descriptive about the converse — the "correlates of attendance or causes of attendance." I feel this reflects a radical change towards the positive in both the diagnosis of the correlates and causes, and in the implementation of strategies. It is fair to say that the causes and correlates of attendance are accentuated as much, or even more, in the research literature in the past ten years as are the correlates and causes of non-attendance. Thus, for this report, non-attendance and attendance are treated as separate sides of the same integral school phenomenon.

The principles and components from the vast range of intervention strategies and projects have been extrapolated, and a strategy is provided which could be applicable, within

degrees, to most, if not all, school situations. Such an approach is realistic in recognizing cultural and economic differences while preserving the features and strengths of proven strategies. Strategies can still be emulated in whole or in part where applicable, or the comprehensive strategy could provide the basis or guidelines from which local strategies could be devised and implemented.

In this context "principle" is taken to mean an underlying "rule" without which no intervention program or strategy can function successfully. "Component" is taken to mean a resource available, either in the form of program, personnel, service or funding, which is considered to be indispensable to the success of a strategy, but which can be made available within degrees or provided in a limited or varying manner.

Some Definitions

Throughout the literature the student who is prone to excessive absenteeism, or appears to be not responding to or benefiting from school, is described as a "marginal student," "disengaged student," or "at-risk student." "School avoidance" is sometimes used in the place of non-attendance or absenteeism; and the terms "truant" and "absentee" are used interchangeably.

The term absenteeism has many definitions which frequently distinguish between "excused" and "non-excused" absences. Authorized absences or exemptions, including suspensions, are considered to be outside of the scope of this report. Nonetheless, that is not to suggest that all absenteeism should not be the subject of concern. Research has consistently questioned the validity of explanations for many "excused" absences, especially sickness, the most commonly cited excuse for absence.

In addition, a restrictive definition of absenteeism does not address the inefficiency of attendance reporting and recording systems used in many schools or the unreasonably punitive policies which create abnormal rates of suspension in some schools. Excused absences, such as illnesses and suspensions, may be deemed to be beyond the control of the school, but the fact is that excused absences constitute the greater portion of absenteeism.

CORRELATES AND CAUSES

Shift in Focus

Since 1985, there has been, in the literature on absenteeism, a shift in the emphasis on factors affecting attendance. The characteristics of the chronic absentee remain virtually the same, and the factors such as peer-pressure and home environment continue to be regarded as just as influential. However, the post-1985 literature differs in that personal and home factors are considered more as background influences. The school is seen, in and of itself, as contributing to absenteeism and, at the same time, as the one institution that can address the combined influence of personal and home factors. These are not merely two sides of the same coin but represent a radical departure from the traditional approaches to the absentee problem.

This predominate emphasis on the role of the school as a cause of absenteeism and as the most important medium to provide intervention strategies has dual implications. From the negative perspective, school factors, such as peer relationships and unhealthy climate, are directly linked to high absentee rates. Conversely, research has indicated that positive school factors, such as positive relationships and healthy school climate, contribute to a high attendance rate.

This is not to suggest that the researchers and authors of the research material have abandoned the traditional understandings of the cause of absenteeism, and that they now lay the blame for, and ascribe the solution to, the problem solely to the school. The traditional correlates and causes remain and can be still categorized under the headings of student, home and environmental factors. The difference is the emphasis on the fundamental and critical role of the school.

Patterns of Non-attendance

Certain facts can be stated or certain patterns established about the problem of absenteeism. Though they cannot be described as causes or correlates per se, they constitute vital information necessary for understanding the problem of absenteeism and for devising strategies and programs to combat it. These patterns pertain to such factors as grade level, sex, and age.

Though there is truancy at primary and elementary schools, in its magnitude, absenteeism is clearly a problem at the high school level. It often begins, however, in the lower grades, especially junior high, and increases until the last year of high school. Truancy has also been associated with the change from one level of schooling to the another, often coinciding with the change from the self-contained classroom at the elementary level to the departmental programs at the junior and senior high school level. Other patterns that

have been established in the literature show that smaller schools have better attendance than larger schools and urban schools have better attendance rates generally than rural schools.

Considerable study has been devoted to the variable of sex of the student as a factor in absenteeism. The findings on this, except, of course, within the specific context of pregnancy, are not conclusive and show variegated patterns from area to area and from school to school. Likewise, age, in itself, is not considered to be a cause or correlate, yet a significant number of studies demonstrate that students with high rates of absenteeism generally tend to be older for their grade, a direct consequence of non-promotion. The fact that absenteeism increases as students get older may not be solely attributed to a lack of interest or to the personal characteristics of adolescence, but may indeed be a factor of "being too old" in the class because of continually not being promoted.

Likewise, research has indicated that race, like sex, is not, in itself, a factor in increasing absenteeism. Findings indicate generally that although minority students have significantly higher rates of absenteeism than their white counterparts, it is equally true that many black and other minority students have significantly lower levels of affluence and parental literacy. Such studies, however, are helpful in that they confirm the impact of socio-economic conditions upon absentee rates and student performance. Similarly, the citing of "part time work" as a cause of or contributing factor to absenteeism may again reflect the more general impact of the socio-economic variable.

The Emerging Truant Profile

The pre-1985 literature tends to emphasize general traits and patterns of attendance, but more recent literature presents a more personal image of the chronic truant and attention is given to specific personality traits as well as negative home and family characteristics. The emerging profile of the truant, although recognizing the patterns associated with non-attendance, is much more personally oriented. This profile is supported in the research, which has become more informative about the emotional and psychological problems of the truant and his or her personal maladjustments.

The truant is often depicted as lacking in self-image and social skills, experiencing psychological and emotional problems, and being strongly influenced by negative family and peer relationships. Home factors tend to emphasize the impact of dysfunctional family characteristics, i.e., the effects of marital discord, of single-parent status, and of negative attitudes towards school and school-related activities. Such students often experience less emotional stablility in the home, are often lacking in parental supervision, or belong to homes that present serious obstacles toadequate family functioning.

Truants are more likely than non-truants to experience behaviour problems. They are frequently described as lazy and uncaring and characterized by aggressive behaviour, temper, defiance, destructiveness, unco-operativeness, disruptiveness, and as having poor

relationships with adults and other children.

Negative personal characteristics and lack of development of social skills may account in some part for the impact of peer pressure and peer influence on student absenteeism. In schools where a student subculture places little or no value on regular attendance, the influence of peers comes to the fore as one of the main factors.

The student's I.Q. level is of prime consideration in the post-1985 research. The research shows a high correlation between I.Q. with better attendance. Lower educational abilities, handicaps, learning problems, difficulty with school work, and concentration deficits correlate with low rates of attendance. Poor educational ability often leads to poor educational achievement and academic failure, the highest correlates of non-attendance identified in the literature. Numerous studies describe chronic absentees as low achievers who experience low school marks, poor achievement, and academic failure.

A student's uninterest or interest in school generally is correlated with non-attendance and attendance respectively. Truants often think that school expectations are difficult, often demonstrate indifference towards school, or feel powerless in school and become resentful. Their academic expectations are often low or average, they lack academic inspiration, and they have difficulty feeling positive about school and adjusting to it. They often have discipline problems, engage in delinquent acts, and are subject to suspensions.

The Influence of the Home

Factors emanating from the student's home environment continue to be cited as one of the leading contributors to absenteeism and one of the greatest influences on school attendance. From whatever perspective the subject is approached, it is clear from the research that a variety of home factors either individually or in the aggregate have a direct influence on this particular aspect of the student's performance. This factor is cited in the literature as "family or personal business," "family factors," "family or personal matters," "family background" and "parental influence." However, it must be kept in mind that the home is a contributor only and is only one of the agencies interacting in attendance.

The Changing Structure of the Family

Not the least of these "home influences" is what is described as the changing structure of the family or the effect of the "dysfunctional" family. Marital discord and divorce, high rates of mobility, and high rates of teenage pregnancy contribute to the greatest single factor that affects or seems to correlate with high absenteeism, i.e., the single parent family. This phenomenon is cited as correlating consistently with high rates of absenteeism in the traditional profile of the chronic absentee, and remains the focus of much research.

Size of Family

Another aspect that has an impact on the student's attendance is the size of the family. The

larger relative size of the family and the number of siblings, combined with the lower socio-economic conditions in which many of these families find themselves, may explain why taking care of other siblings remains a leading cause of absenteeism in lower socio-economic areas.

Socio-economic Factors

Socio-economic factors greatly affect attendance, and are cited in the literature as key correlates irrespective of I.Q. Students with high rates of absenteeism often either come from "poor homes" with "unemployed parents" or from "less affluent homes," from "low income families" or families suffering from the effects of "economic deprivation" signified by the receipt of social welfare, a missing wage-earner or where the parents are engaged in low paying jobs. Students with high patterns of absenteeism are described as "economically disadvantaged"; the results of which are often inadequate nutrition and health care, clothing needs and employment-child care conflicts. Under such conditions, students may be required to care for their younger siblings or may be needed to work at home.[1]

Parental Attitudes and Parenting Skills

The performance or effectiveness of the parents is affected by varying family conditions, the changing structure, mobility of the family, and poor socio-economic circumstances. However, even where two parents are present in the home, they may not be effective parents. The character of the parents themselves, their family attitudes and attitudes towards their children, especially in the exercise of parenting skills, and their attitude towards and involvement in school, especially in support for the child, convey strong messages.

Parents of truants are often described as lacking in ambition or vision, virtually illiterate, not experiencing success, and rarely achieving either academic or professional success. The breakdown of the home or family or the existence of the dysfunctional family has resulted in poor parenting skills, and the loss or erosion of parental control. Conflicts at home include intense one-to-one relationships and the breakdown of child-parent communication. Parenting skills, or the lack of them in the form of parental acquiescence, is a risk factor frequently associated with truancy. Conversely, both effective parenting skills and positive family and home functioning correlate with high attendance.

The parents' skills in the home, and their attitudes towards the child in the school and towards school in general are linked to attendance performance. Parents of students with low attendance rates are often described as being only nominally interested in school, as rarely inquiring about studies, as never budgeting home study time, as fearing school and avoiding teacher-parent interviews.

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1. S. Sparkes, "Absenteeism Is an Economic Problem," *Canadian School Executive* 7:2 (1987), pp. 14-15.

The School as a Cause or Correlate

It is clear from the preceding section that the post-1985 literature continues the pre-1985 enumeration of personal and home factors which, either positively and negatively, have an impact on attendance patterns. However, it is wise to again caution schools against approaching the problem of absenteeism from a stereotypical point of view. School staff commonly think that absenteeism is the result of a student's individual problems and problems with peers or at home. Unquestionably, student characteristics and home factors can be cited as correlates of attendance. However, the literature since 1985 demonstrates that the school as an institution can, on the one hand, "cause" absenteeism and, on the other hand, take a more proactive role in relation to the student and the home to address the problem of absenteeism. It is this dual focus on the school that is the most significant change in the post-1985 literature.

Traditionally, the school has accepted the main cause of absenteeism to be the home and the student, and considered any solution to be beyond the school's control. What is revolutionary about the post-1985 literature is that the school has been demonstrated to be in itself a contributor to absenteeism, failing to respond to the influences that detract from regular attendance. From a positive perspective, what is enlightening and uplifting are the number of schools and school-sponsored attendance initiatives that have successfully addressed the problem.

In that sense, the school can be a force for change. Where the school can be condemned is in its reluctance to pay other than lip service to prevention. The school, as an institution, often serves to make the student become an irregular attender. Such enabling practices may include failing to confront excessive absences and tardiness by accepting any excused absences from parents, accepting late homework, establishing vague or unenforceable discipline policies, attributing attendance problems to the family but not involving the family in the solution, failing to establish school expectations and recognition of regular attendance, and setting low expectations for students.

Successful and Unsuccessful Schools

Effective schools and school improvement literature frequently cites research findings that compare and contrast what are deemed to be "successful" and "unsuccessful schools," and of schools that demonstrate higher and lower rates of attendance. On this point, the research has been particularly instructive in identifying practices, strategies and characteristics within schools that have consistently attained high rates of attendance in contrast to schools that lack these characteristics or practises and have lower rates of attendance.

School Organization and Administration

Schools successful in improving attendance exhibit strong leadership and have clear rules for students. Schools with poor attendance are criticized for inconsistent disciplinary procedures, permissive and ineffective attendance policies, inadequate monitoring, inconsistent enforcement of rules, punitive consequences, lack of positive consequences, and the perception that school authorities and others lack concern and authority for enforcing attendance regulations.

School Tone or Climate

The impact of the general tone, feeling or atmosphere within the school, referred to most often in the literature as either school climate or ethos, appears as a constant factor in the research literature. Climate or ethos, as used in this context, reflects the various beliefs, expectations, attitudes and practices which form the norm in the school as a social system. A number of projects and studies link improved student attendance with a positive school climate, a climate that values success and achievement and fosters a sense of caring and belonging among students and teachers. High truancy schools, on the other hand, tend to be more authoritarian and custodial than schools described as more caring or democratic. This does not mean that the schools should not initiate or enforce policy or expect students to comply with authority. The research indicates that schools with high attendance rates, in fact, include, within their administrative responsibilities, student knowledge of rules or codes of conduct.

Research into student perspectives on various aspects of school environment and performance also focus on the role of the school. Students cite boredom, loss of interest, problems with a school course, suspensions, and relations with teachers and staff as reasons for poor attendance. The most common reasons young people give for truancy involve institutional factors, the curriculum, and emphasis on examinations. Other school features cited as reasons for tardiness and cutting classes include limited opportunity for social interaction, irrelevant course content, and teacher indifference.

The Curriculum

Another important feature of the school that affects attendance is the curriculum, both academic curriculum as well as co-curricular and extracurricular activities. This too constitutes part of the shift in the research literature. Earlier we noted that one of the ramifications of poor attendance was poor academic performance; however, as Estcourt points out "while poor attendance leads to low achievement, it may be more important to realise that low achievement can lead to poor attendance."[2] Students who have difficulty in finding success in school are more likely to seek alternatives to a unrewarding classroom. Numerous studies refer to the lack of relevance of the curriculum, inadequate or inappropriate curriculum, or non-challenging curriculum as one of the chief factors in truancy.

The Classroom and the Teacher

The aspect of the school that appears to have the most direct impact on attendance and non-attendance is actual classroom activity and, more specifically, the teacher's person and performance. Closely associated with the personality of the teacher, and perhaps deriving from it, is the teacher's attitude towards students. The teacher's relationship with the student, particularly with respect to academic involvement, is a specific factor within the classroom which correlates highly with attendance patterns. The teacher's low expectations and negative behaviour become the child's reality in performance and attitude. High attendance performance is exhibited by students who feel supported by the teacher and

2. Caroline Estcourt, "Chronic Absentee Committee Report at Centennial High School,"(Gresham, OR: Centennial School District, 1986).

who are given clear expectations. Attendance improves when the teacher employs frequent praise and feedback and uses thought-out lesson plans, where students are treated with respect, where requests are more the norm than directives, where students have the opportunity to present their views, and where the physical environment (the classroom decoration) is pleasing. Conversely, high levels of non-attendance are exhibited by students who feel that teachers do not care, in classes in which teachers exhibit a belief that the students are not capable, or in schools and classes in which discipline is handled solely by rigid enforcement of rules and in which the teachers are inconsistent in applying rules.

The way in which the teacher relates to the individual student is, of course, an indication of the general way in which the teacher relates to the class or manages the class. A number of studies of teacher practices confirm a high correlation between classroom behaviour and days absent. The research suggests that attendance is higher in classes where teacher arrive promptly, frequently praise good work and behaviour, interact with the class as a whole, minimize competition, offer support for learning and avoid corporal punishment.

Conversely, teacher behaviours that correlate with high absentee rates include the use or overuse of judgmental vocabulary and demeaning labels, disrespect, negative feedback, discouragement of verbal interaction, orders, domination in verbal exchanges, authoritarian classroom climates, whole class punishment and threats or rejections.

The research has also specifically identified teaching practices that affect attendance or non-attendance. French, for example, found "Classrooms which are intellectually challenging, meaningful, and actively engaging students in the learning process have better attendance."[3] Other studies show that increased attendance is linked to high teacher expectations, increased time on task, longer waiting time on questions, innovative instructional strategies like co-operative, tactile projects and experiential learning, parental involvement in the learning process, and the integration of thematic material into the curriculum.

Others have found that the traditional approach to learning is correlated with high absenteeism. Classes that are highly competitive, high in teacher control, low in teacher support, and stringent in grading practices are also correlated with high absentee rates. Two U.S. researchers correlate high absenc classes with "a great deal of written seat work and independent silent reading."[4] Classes are "better attended," they maintain, where there is a more interactive instructional program, where the students read and recite aloud, and where students are engaged in dialogue, oral drill or practise with the teacher.

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3. Dan French, *A Focus on Discipline and Attendance: Structuring Schools for Student Success* (Boston: Massachusetts State Board of Education, 1991).

4. Ward J. Ghory and Robert L. Sinclair, "The Reality of Marginality: Current State of Affairs for Marginal Students," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C., April 1987, p. 20.

INTERVENTION PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES

Analyses of Strategies

The research literature provides a vast number, and considerable range, of intervention strategies that have been initiated and implemented in various schools and school districts throughout Canada and the United States to combat the problem of non-attendance. Thomas,[5] for example, lists and summarizes 106 strategies and ideas that are being implemented to improve attendance or reduce the dropout rate. A second resource handbook from the Oakland County Schools [6] offers 187 programs that appear to be successful. Other such comprehensive documents identify a wide range of procedures used in combating absenteeism, provide an overview of the roles of all stakeholders in the attendance process, and summarize the relevance of strategies available from school initiatives to court rulings and fines assessment.

Strategies range from the size and complexity of large inner city programs to projects dealing with as few as nine students as was the case with Project 99 in Ponoka Junior High School in Alberta.[7] The focus of the strategies range from teenage pregnancy to asthma, from contingency contracting to youth leadership. They may be heavily oriented towards counselling or totally oriented towards skill development such as the ACOPS program in Manitoba.[8] They may be in a pilot stage or be of five or more years old. They may be elaborately constructed programs or they may be small incentive programs within one school. They may be as routine as "school improvement" or as radical as operating a school year round. Any effort to compare the multitude of programs or to weigh their various merits and weaknesses objectively and scientifically would involve a gargantuan task, and certainly would be beyond the scope of this short report.

There is also the problem of analyzing findings and applying results. Where research findings are reported in the form of statistical data, findings can be very inconclusive in demonstrating the success (or its lack) of programs and strategies, or they can produce ambiguous or mixed conclusions. However, the existence of ambiguous or negative findings and the problems encountered in analyses and applicability do not detract from the basic common finding — intervention does succeed. Inconclusive and negative findings are amply counterbalanced by findings that provide evidence of successful programs. Even inconclusiveness is often qualified by more positive findings and

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5. Terry Thomas (Ed.), *106 Programs/Ideas for Reducing Student Absenteeism and Dropouts. READ Resource Handbook for School Administrators, Volume XI* (Pontiac, MI: Oakland County Schools, 1985).

6. Terry Thomas and R. Sykes (Eds.), *187 Alternative Educational Programs for Reducing Absenteeism and the Dropout Rate. READ: A Resource Handbook for School Administrators. Volume XIII* (Pontiac, MI: Oakland County Schools,1986).

7. D. Hepburn, *Project 99: The Evaluation of a Modified Junior High School Program for Over-age, Underachieving Students* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education, 1988).

8. L. Gwozdz, "Unemployed Students: Alternative Program Produces Perfect Attendance [ACOPS — A Classroom on the Pembina Strip]," *Education Manitoba* 16:4 (1989), pp. 12-13.

observations. Research findings, more often than not, demonstrate that intervention strategies do work. Whether the results are couched in superlative language, are more modest in description, or simply list positive improvements to the student or his or her circumstances, the statement is clear and definitive — absenteeism can be successfully challenged.

Problem of Adaptability

There is also the question of adaptability or applicability of intervention strategies to local conditions. Additional resources are needed. Evaluators of many good strategies cite the allocation of significant additional funding for hiring or assigning special or extra personnel and providing special resources as a necessary component of any successful strategy. Such additional resources are found as parts of programs directly dealing with the socio-economic conditions associated with absenteeism, particularly in programs for pregnant teenagers and teenage single mothers. Some programs provide financial incentives, child care and transportation for pregnant teenagers and teenage custodial parents to ensure their attendance.

Funding is also an integral component of programs for helping other types of at-risk students. Funds may be used to hire a facilitator or to provide meetings for staff, students and parents. In some cases, funding approximated and sometimes even exceeded $1,000 per student for absentee intervention alone.

Like the direct additional funding and the provision of additional resources cited above, alternative schools have proven to be a successful intervention strategy.

Anyone familiar with the relatively limited funding available for education in most provinces may be immediately discouraged about the applicability and usefulness of such programs. Even if the current fiscal restraints in public spending, the reductions and cutbacks in all public services, including education, dictate that additional resources may not be part of any new intervention strategies, it does not mean that successful strategies cannot or should not be initiated. The funding component should not be overlooked or dismissed, since no money for additional resources and personnel can be critical to the success of some strategies. However, additional funding is not critical to *all* approaches. An approach can be taken that realistically takes into account limited resources.

Comprehensive lists of strategies and publications already exist and they can be adapted or utilized independently. We are not listing or summarizing strategies here — nor are we going to compare them. Having examined the successful intervention strategies, and understanding that resources are limited, we will present a method of analysis which would be applicable locally, even to small rural schools. Certain common principles can be deduced from successful strategies, and all successful strategies contain, to some degree, visible components that are integral to that strategy. I define principles as being bases for action that are universally applicable, such as, for example, the necessity of co-operation.

Components are visible resources which are, or should be, available in some degree in every school; for example, guidance services. Those interested in addressing the absentee problem can take the principles of intervention strategies and make the best use of the components available to develop strategies suitable to their particular school or school district.

Principles of Successful Intervention Programs

Four major principles are necessary to any successful intervention to improve school attendance.

1. Awareness
Making students, parents, teachers and the community more conscious of the seriousness and the impact of abstenteeism is the first step in finding a solution.

2. Perspectives
There needs to be a general change in attitude. We must recognize the school's dual role as a contributor to the cause of, and the solution to, absenteeism. Further, there are limitations to adapting models and strategies; one must take into account local culture and resource constraints. Also, incentive approaches will ultimately prove more successful than punitive approaches.

3. Early Intervention
Another principle underlying successful attendance programs appears to be *early* intervention. Although attendance is considered to be a problem at the junior and especially senior high grades, there is evidence that patterns of poor attendance start in the lower grades and become progressively worse with each subsequent grade.

4. Co-operation and Involvement
Any successful approach needs the co-operation and involvement of a wide range of school personnel and community agencies. Successful intervention, for the most part, comes from the combined efforts of students, parents, teachers, and community-based organizations.

Components of Successful Intervention Programs

These components are essential for a successful attendance program.

1. Development and Implementation of Attendance Policies
Clear policies and regulations governing school attendance must be developed by the department of education, school district and school. Policy should be the result of a co-

operative approach. Responsibilities of various personnel at each level of jurisdiction must be identified. Public awareness of attendance policies and regulations must be given priority.

2. Monitoring, Tracking and Recording
Any attempt to reduce absenteeism should comprise accurate and prompt monitoring, tracking and recording of absences and must include consistent follow-up procedures. Computer technology has advantages in time and personnel, but the approach should, of course, depend on the size and complexity of the school, keeping in mind that personal contact seems to be the most effective.

3. Parental Involvement
Parent involvement is essential in dealing with absenteeism. The school must continuously heighten parental awareness of the importance of regular attendance through various forms of media — parent letters, newsletters, meetings and parent workshops.

4. Counselling and Guidance
Counselling and guidance services are essential. Efforts must be made to ensure all schools are provided with the resources to offer adequate guidance and counselling services. Counselling may take many forms from the traditional approaches to peer leadership and peer counselling.

5. Curriculum and Alternative Programming
Many students decide not to attend school because they think school, and especially its curriculum, is not relevant to their everyday lives. Others believe that the curriculum is too difficult. This is often dismissed as the student's excuse for not attending, rather than a possible institutional weakness. The provincial ministries of education, school boards and schools must constantly examine the issue of curriculum relevancy and question whether or not every effort is made to ensure some kind of success for every student. An alternative curriculum through programs, plans or components designed specifically to meet the needs of the at-risk student should be provided. These may range from basic remedial reading or enrichment programs in the elementary grades to co-operative learning, vocational education, or advanced placement programs in the senior high school.

The Role of the School

The post-1985 research literature on school attendance indicates a shift of focus from the student as truant to the school as part of both the problem and the solution. Effective school practices have an impact on students' decisions to attend. The research has consistently documented that improvements within the school are almost always followed by improvements in performance and attendance. Programs implemented as *school-wide* improvements have been consistently successful in reducing attendance problems.

Most summaries of recommended policies and practices cite the school both as the initiator

and the administrator. It is through the school that the principles discussed here must find expression in policy and it is through the school that the programs must be administered. It is the school that must take the responsibility for the strict monitoring and tracking of attendance, for parent contact, and for rewarding students for good attendance.

How can current policies, features and practices of the school be improved? What can the schools with limited resources do to improve their current approaches? The characteristics of effective schools can be used as a basis for starting up intervention strategies.

The School as Student-centred

The school must, in recognition of the attitude shift evident in the attendance literature, as well as in the effective schools literature, ensure a student-centred approach. This would include both a change in attitude and the provision of support services to give the student every available opportunity to progress and succeed. This attention can be provided in a number of ways through the school's treatment of, and relationship with, the student. There should be an opportunity for student participation in the school, and the provision of support services, including particular curriculum services.

The School as a Caring Institution and a Functional Community

Many personal factors correlate with absenteeism — the lack of self-esteem, social and other personal development skills. The recognition of this fact and the provision of a warm and caring climate are ways of giving students a feeling of belonging and encouraging positive responses through improved attitudes and participation in school. The school must provide activities for achievement and self-enhancement, be interested in the students, and demonstrate high expectations for them in all areas.

Also important to improving attendance is developing a school climate that can accommodate not only the various negative personal characteristics of the student but also can compensate for poor socio-economic and home conditions. The school should provide the nurture and support that is characteristic of a functional community.

The School as a Community Organization

Increased support and intervention from community-based organizations can also be an effective means of improving attendance. The school must encourage community-based organizations to establish relationships with students that can motivate them to attend school regularly.

The School as Experimenter and Risk-taker

The school must be open to innovative practices and strategies and to involving students and parents directly in the process of improving attendance. Contingency contracting is one example of such an approach. Contracting has been applied effectively to a variety of students and problems, including attendance. And, as noted earlier, research has suggested that students who have input into designing interventions for their academic or behavioural improvement are likely to perform better than students with little or no opportunity for such input.

The School as a Team

The focus on the student is not to underestimate the leadership role that the school, and especially the principal and classroom teacher, must play. Research indicates that strong and effective leadership in conjunction with the other changes in the school are necessary to initiate reform. It is also necessary in providing consistency and continuity to policy change and intervention.

The principal, as leader of the school team, must direct both the expression of the principles and the administration of the strategies. The principal must demonstrate commitment, support school staff, foster an appropriate climate, and place school-wide emphasis on regular attendance. He or she must demonstrate responsibility for communicating information about the attendance policies, initiate and monitor attendance improvement programs and strategies, and enhance the overall school climate.

It is the classroom teacher, however, working with the principal, who can provide perhaps the single best response to the problems of absenteeism. The literature consistently stresses the importance of direct teacher involvement with the problem of absenteeism and emphasizes how necessary it is for the classroom teacher to have a caring and positive attitude.

Generally speaking, it is especially through varied innovative teaching techniques that call for more group participation that teachers can improve the school's holding power and maintain the students' interest and participation. To emphasize the importance of the teacher's role and to assist the teacher in discharging this role, there should be special truancy training for pre-service teachers. In-service training would also help teachers become more sensitive to the significance of their role in affecting student attendance.

Attendance is not solely the school's responsibility. The attempt to define the school's role, and both its positive and negative influence, demonstrates the school's unique position. No other agency can replace the school, and no other person can replace the teacher. Therein lies the responsibility and the challenge.

Support for the School

It is the school's responsibility to enunciate the principles of successful strategies, and administer whatever components are available and accessible. The success or failure of the school to accomplish its objective lies, in the first instance, within the school itself. Its collective strengths can be utilized for positive gains, or they can be underutilized. But if the school wishes to concentrate on successfully undertaking the challenge to address absenteeism, it must receive support, since it is difficult, if not impossible, for the school, irrespective of its capability, to act alone. The principles or the provision of the components cannot be accomplished solely within the school. There are factors beyond the realm of the school that are more properly the responsibility of other agencies.

The first of these is the provision of additional resources, through funding for personnel, material and programs. Examples of funding supplied by various levels of government have been referred to earlier. Additional guidance counsellors, additional teachers for special truancy programs, the purchase of computers and automatic dial telephones for monitoring, and the cost of alternative programs, are all beyond the purview of the school and more properly rest with the school boards and the province. Addressing the socio-economic problems falls within the orbit of the various social service agencies.

The literature clearly demonstrates that research is within the jurisdiction of the provinces through the departments of education and universities, and, perhaps, within a limited context, the schools and school board central offices. Research on comparative school performance is initiated and administered at the district or provincial level. Few, if any, research projects appear to be administered by schools. If data are to be available to induce awareness or consciousness of the problem, research must be done for the schools by either boards, departments of education, or universities, either separately or acting together.

Developing comprehensive policy and broad plans are the responsibility of either the provincial governments or the school boards. Provincial departments of education along with school boards must provide schools with direction and support in this matter. Both pre-service and in-service teacher training ought to include special truancy training as part of a major provincial strategy to combat absenteeism.

Leadership in curriculum development and organization to accommodate alternative programs lies, in most provinces, within the jurisdiction of the provincial department of education and school districts. In-service training to support the principal's leadership role in developing innovative ways to organize and structure curriculum should be provided by the departments of education and universities in conjunction with school boards.

Lastly, the provincial departments of education should support school- and board-sponsored initiatives, and recognize successful performance. More use should be made of the media in raising consciousness of the problem of absenteeism, and especially in drawing attention to successful district and school intervention programs and strategies. By working together to improve school attendance, the department of education, school boards and schools can provide a model of inter-agency co-operation.

COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE IN CANADA

Legislation in all ten provinces and two territories provide for compulsory education. In all jurisdictions age limits and exemptions to compulsory attendance ar specified. In a number of jurisdictions, legislation provides measures to enforce attendance, through the appointment of attendance officers or the application of sanctions against offending parents or students, or both.

Age Limits

In most jurisdictions, the age of compulsory entry is 6 years. Four provinces — Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan — do not require attendance until age 7, while in British Columbia, children 5 years of age by December 31 of the school year must attend. (See Table 1.)

Although the age limits for compulsory education are fairly consistent within Canada, they differ slightly according to the student's exact date of birth and other conditions specified in legislation. For example, children in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and the Northwest Territories are required to attend school if they are 6 years of age by the first school day in September; in Nova Scotia, if they are 6 by October 1; in the Yukon, 6 years 8 months by September 1; and in Newfoundland, 6 by December 31 of the school year. Similarly, the entry age of 7 years differs from attaining the 7th birthday in Saskatchewan, to 7 years of age within 12 weeks of the beginning of fall term in Manitoba, to 7 years of age as of December 31 and January 31 in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island respectively.

The minimum leaving age in all provinces and territories is 16 years of age. In six provinces, students may leave upon attaining their 16th birthday (Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta). In the Northwest Territories, students, who on December 31 of an academic year are 15 years of age, must attend. In all other jurisdictions, students must attend until the end of either the school term in which their 16th birthday occurs (Manitoba) or to the end of the school year in which their birthday occurs (Newfoundland, Quebec, Yukon).

Table 1
Age Limits for Compulsory Attendance

PROVINCE/TERRITORY	ENTRY AGE	MINIMUM LEAVING AGE
Newfoundland	6 years of age by December 31	16 - student must attend to the end of school year in which 16th birthday occurs
Prince Edward Island	7 years of age as of January 31	16 - student may leave upon attaining 16th birthday
Nova Scotia	6 years of age as of October 1	16 - student may leave upon attaining 16th birthday
New Brunswick	7 years of age as of December 31	16 - student may leave upon attaining 16th birthday
Quebec	6 years of age as of the first school day in September	16 - student must attend to end of school year in which 16th birthday occurs
Ontario	6 years of age by September 1 of the school year	16 - student may leave upon attaining 16th birthday
Manitoba	7 years of age as of the first school day in the fall term or within 12 weeks thereafter	16 - student must attend to the end of term in which 16th birthday occurs
Saskatchewan	7- student must attend on attaining 7th birthday	16 -student may leave upon attaining 16th birthday
Alberta	6 years by first school day in September	16 -student may leave upon attaining 16th birthday
British Columbia	5 years on or before December 31	16 -student may leave upon attaining 16th birthday
Northwest Territories	6 years as of the first school day in December	16 - student must attend who on December 31 of an academic year is 15; in practical terms student must stay in school until age 16
Yukon	6 years and 8 months or older by September 1	16 -student must attend to end of school year in which 16th birthday occurs

Exemptions to Compulsory Attendance

Statutory exemptions to compulsory attendance exist in all ten provinces and the two territories. Although there are common reasons for exemptions, there is a wide range of acceptable reasons for some exemptions. (See Table 2 on pages 22 and 23.)

Instruction at Home or Elsewhere
All ten provinces and two territories include one or more of: instruction at home or elsewhere, distance or correspondence education, attendance at a private or independent school, enrolment in other educational programs or in a school for special services. In most cases, legislation requires the authorities to certify that instruction is adequate, efficient, equivalent to that of public schools and requires that private and independent schools be subject to government or school board regulations. This allows for wide discretion in approval by local authorities.

Unavoidable Cause or Illness
Legislation in all provinces and territories, with the exception of the Yukon, make specific reference to one or more of: unavoidable cause, illness, sickness, medical treatment, or exemption under public health legislation.

Completion of Grade/Graduation
Only Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick make specific reference to completion of grade 12; Ontario refers to "graduation from secondary school or equivalent" while Quebec provides for exemption for an award of diploma by the Minister. All other provinces and territories are silent on completion of grade.

Suspension or Expulsion
Legislation in all provinces and territories with the exception of Nova Scotia and Manitoba make specific reference to exemption of a child under suspension and/or expulsion; Ontario includes "exclusion" as well as suspension and expulsion.

Assistance at Home
Only one province, Nova Scotia, specifically refers to home help as a legitimate exemption and then only when the child is over 12 years of age and for no more than six weeks. However, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario allow for "application by parent" and Alberta includes parental consent for "sufficient cause." In New Brunswick and Quebec there is a six-week limit per term and year respectively, and in Ontario this provision applies only to students over 14 years of age. Exemption for "aboriginal harvesting activities" in the Yukon and "traditional native activities" in the Northwest Territories could fall within this category.

Parental application in New Brunswick, Ontario and Saskatchewan and parental consent for "sufficient cause" in Alberta might also be interpreted to include assistance at home.

Work Experience Programs and Work Permits

Only Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta specifically refer in legislation to exemption for work experience programs. However, in the other provinces and territories, discretionary powers of the school, the school board or the Minister of Education would allow for exemption for such programs. In Ontario, for example, the Minister of Education may make regulations excusing children over 14 from attendance, including those in work experience and co-operative education programs. It would appear that in some jurisdictions, such as in Newfoundland, attending work experience or co-operative programs would not be considered as exemption from school but as regular attendance at school.

Exemption from attendance with a work permit is provided for in legislation only in Nova Scotia and Quebec. In Nova Scotia, certificates of employment (temporary or permanent), may be issued by the school board on application from the parent in writing to the principal. When the child ceases work with the employer, the permit expires and the child must return to regular school attendance. In Quebec, a school board may exempt a child for one or more periods totalling no more than six weeks in a school year to allow the child to carry out "urgent work." Again, however, discretionary powers of the school, the school board or the Minister of Education may allow exemption for work purposes. The school attendance legislation in the Yukon makes specific reference to exemption for "harvesting activities." It also allows the superintendent or director, upon application from a student or a parent, to excuse a student from attendance and in doing so to attach conditions. Likewise, in Manitoba, a child over 15 years of age, with the approval of the school attendance officer, the superintendent, and the child's parents may obtain a certificate excusing attendance; in Ontario, the Minister may make regulations excusing children over 14 from attendance. Only two provinces, New Brunswick and Manitoba, specifically forbid employment of children of compulsory attendance age during school hours.

Lack of Transportation/Distance from School

In Nova Scotia a child under 10 years of age may be exempt where transportation is not provided. Only two provinces, Ontario and Saskatchewan, make statutory provision for exempting pupils living more than a specified distance from school.

Special Needs

Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Northwest Territories provide statutory exemption for students whose needs cannot be met in the educational program offered by the school or school board. In Nova Scotia, legislation refers to insufficient accommodation in the local school, while Quebec allows statutory exemption for "social maladjustment, physical or mental handicap." Prince Edward Island excuses students for whom the department of education provides special education services such as deaf and blind pupils, and pupils suffering from cerebral palsy. Saskatchewan provides exemption for "other education in programs approved by the board of education."

Observance of Religious Holidays

Six provinces provide statutory exemption for observance of religious holidays: Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. In the Yukon, students are excused for participation in aboriginal cultural activities; in the Northwest Territories, for traditional native activities.

Other Reasons for Exemptions

A number of other exemptions are provided for in legislation. In Newfoundland, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon exemption is permitted for experiences of educational/social and cultural reasons respectively, while in Saskatchewan, a child may be exempt for "travel with parents (for more than five days)" after consultation with the school principal. In Alberta, a child may be exempt where the parent shows "sufficient cause."

Ministerial Certification

New Brunswick and Ontario allow for general ministerial approval for exemption; this applies to children over age 14 in Ontario. Parental application for exemption requires ministerial approval in New Brunswick and Manitoba. Also, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Manitoba require ministerial approval for exemption under the categories of instruction elsewhere and/or home schooling; in Alberta, for example, home instruction must be supervised by a board. As well most provinces regulate private and independent schools by requiring one or more of: approval by the Minister, registration, or supervision by the department of education or by a school board.

Superintendent and School Board Approval

In Saskatchewan, a child may be excused where the superintendent certifies that the pupil's attendance is not productive or is detrimental to the school. In Newfoundland, Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Northwest Territories, exemption on the basis of adequate instruction elsewhere and/or home schooling requires the approval of either the local supervisor or superintendent. Also in the Northwest Territories, a child may be excused if the superintendent certifies that no suitable program is offered by the child's school. In the Yukon, the superintendent or director, on application from a student or a parent of a student, may excuse the student from attendance and may attach conditions, including that of optional education, to the permission to be excused.

Principal Approval

In most Canadian jurisdictions, the school principal exercises discretion when it comes to school attendance. The approval of the school principal is referred to specifically in legislation in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Ontario, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories. Two provinces are worthy of note: in Newfoundland, the principal has the authority to excuse a student on the basis of educational and social value, or for any other reason other than neglect or refusal to attend; in Saskatchewan, consultation with the principal is required where a child will be travelling with his or her parents for more than five days.

Table 2
Reasons for Exemption from Compulsory Attendance

Newfoundland	- instruction at home or elsewhere - unavoidable cause or illness - principal approval for experiences of significant educational and social value, or any other reason that is not neglect or refusal to send the child to school - child under suspension or expulsion
Prince Edward Island	- completion of grade 12 - instruction elsewhere - student for whom the department has provided special education services - certification by Minister - sickness or other cause reported to and approved by the principal - observance of a religious holiday - child under suspension
Nova Scotia	- equivalent instruction elsewhere - over 13, School Board Certificate where child assists at home (over 12, for no more than six weeks) - mental or physical condition renders instruction impractical - under 10, transportation not provided - insufficient accommodation in local school - temporary illness - excused under *Public Health Act*
New Brunswick	- completion of grade 12 - efficient instruction elsewhere (ministerial approval) - Minister's certification in writing that the child should be exempt - sickness or unavoidable cause - application by parent (to six weeks per term) - child under suspension or expulsion - religious observance
Quebec	- diploma by Minister - home instruction, at private institution, or through attending program under international agreement - child carrying out urgent work (to six weeks per year) - social maladjustment, physical or mental handicap - illness or medical treatment - student expelled
Ontario	- graduation or equivalent - instruction at home or elsewhere - parent application, ministerial approval (for over 14) - illness or other unavoidable cause - principal may temporarily excuse pupil - specified distance from school - music instruction - suspension, expulsion or exclusion - religious observance

Manitoba	- Minister certification for instruction elsewhere - attending a private school - if over 15, approval of attendance officer, superintendent and parent - sickness or other unavoidable cause - observance of a religious holiday
Saskatchewan	- instruction at home or elsewhere - registered at independent school - work-experience program - illness or unavoidable cause - superintendent certifies attendance not productive or detrimental to the school - board-approved educational program - travelling with parents more than five days - specified distance from school - suspension or expulsion - *The Health Act* - religious holiday - receiving medical treatment
Alberta	- home education program (under supervision of a board) - attending private school approved by the Minister - work-experience program approved by the board - special needs that cannot be met in the education program - parental consent for sufficient cause - illness or other unavoidable cause - religious holiday - suspension or expulsion
British Columbia	- home schooling - attendance at independent school - register with regional correspondence school - suspension, an educational program must be provided - if over 16, fails to comply with rules - under regulations, principal may excuse for sickness, sickness in the family, danger to health from serious exposure, or for other unavoidable cause which makes attendance impractical
Northwest Territories	- adequate instruction elsewhere - attending a private school - illness or other unavoidable cause - participating in traditional native activities - no suitable program of instruction - suspension or expulsion
Yukon	- enrolled in home education program - attendance at a private school - enrolled in distance education courses - Yukon aboriginal cultural activities or harvesting activities - sickness or other unavoidable cause - suspension - *Public Health Act* - approval of superintendent or director on application from student or parent; may attach conditions including educational program

Enforcement

Appointment of Attendance Officers or Counsellors

The terms "attendance officer," and "attendance counsellor" are used interchangeably in referring to those responsible for the administration and enforcement of school attendance legislation in seven of the provinces or territory. Legislation in Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Alberta require school boards to appoint one or more attendance officers. In Alberta, attendance officer is defined as "the superintendent or any other individual designated by the board as an attendance officer." In Ontario, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon, the term "attendance counsellor" refers to individuals at the school, board and ministry level charged with enforcement of school attendance regulations. In Ontario, a Provincial Attendance Counsellor is appointed as well as one or more attendance counsellors at the board or district level. Saskatchewan requires each board to appoint an attendance counsellor, and in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon the Minister and deputy minister of education respectively have the discretion to appoint attendance counsellors. Table 3 presents an overview of provincial and territorial legislation governing the appointment of attendance officers or counsellors.

In the remaining five provinces, responsibility for enforcing school attendance legislation is designated to either the school board as in Prince Edward Island; to teachers, school and school boards as in Newfoundland; or to the school principal or other person designated by the school board as in New Brunswick and Quebec.

Duties and Responsibilities of Attendance Officers/Counsellors

In the provinces and territories where attendance officers or counsellors are appointed, the duties and responsibilities are similar. They include general monitoring and enforcement of attendance regulations as well as specific tasks of investigating and reporting truancy, issuing warnings and notices, and initiating prosecution. Legislation in Alberta provides attendance officers with the authority to make application for an order to enter premises for the purpose of searching for truants and to require truant students to comply with his or her directives to return to school or home. (See Table 3.)

Table 3
Attendance Officers or Counsellors

PROVINCE/ TERRITORY	ATTENDANCE OFFICERS	DUTIES/REGULATIONS/COMMENTS
Newfoundland	No provision for appointment of attendance officers	Monitoring and reporting attendance is assigned to teachers, schools, and school boards in co-operation with other agencies; the superintendent can recommend prosecution.
Prince Edward Island	No provision for appointment of attendance officers	Each regional school board shall regulate attendance and is responsible for ensuring that the provisions of the *School Act* are enforced.
Nova Scotia	A school board shall designate one or more persons as attendance officers to enforce the provision of the *Act*	The attendance officer has the authority to serve warning notices to parents or guardians; to institute, or cause to be instituted, proceedings against a parent; to institute proceedings with respect to absences or misbehaviour of the child; to investigate causes for poor attendance and to recommend appropriate steps for its mitigation; and to co-operate with legal officials.
New Brunswick	No provision for appointment of attendance officer	Principal or person designated by the school board shall examine cases of non-compliance.
Quebec	No provision for appointment of attendance officer	Under the *Education Act* the principal monitors attendance and reports "habitual absences" with no valid excuse to the Director of Youth Protection.
Ontario	Provincial School Attendance Counsellor appointed to "superintend and direct enforcement." Every school board shall appoint one or more attendance counsellors	The attendance counsellor is required to inquire into absences and give warnings and notices to parents and can initiate prosecutions. Where there is no attendance counsellor, the appropriate supervisory officer shall notify parents of the law.
Manitoba	Every board shall appoint attendance officers	Carry out duties as defined by the board.
Saskatchewan	Every board shall appoint an attendance counsellor	The attendance counsellor is required to administer the school attendance provisions; to investigate, report, and institute proceedings.

Alberta	Attendance officers appointed	The attendance officer is required to enter, during school hours, a building or premises, or dwelling place if authorized by an order, send the student home or to school, accompany the student for that purpose, and deal with the student in accordance with board rules; to make an *ex parte* application to a judge or justice of peace for an order to enter a place or premises to search for a student and an order requiring the student to comply with the directions of the attendance officer; to ensure that a student has been advised of his or her duty to attend school and that all reasonable efforts have been made to enforce a student's attendance.
British Columbia	No provision for appointment of attendance officers	
Northwest Territories	The Minister, on the recommendation of a local education authority, may appoint one or more school counsellors for the education district, the education division or the school operated by the Board of Secondary Education	Additional duties of counsellors may be prescribed upon the recommendation of the Minister.
Yukon	The deputy minister or a school board may designate school attendance counsellors	Assist in the enforcement of the compulsory attendance provisions of the *Act*.

Enforcement against Parents

In all provinces and territories, legislation places the responsibility for compulsory school attendance on the parents or guardians. Most, but not all, jurisdictions provide for penalties, upon conviction, against parents or guardians for failing to secure the attendance of their children. Only British Columbia and Quebec do not provide for such penalties. In the jurisdictions that do provide for penalties, there exists a wide variation in the fines that may be imposed. (See Table 4.) The extent to which these sanctions are actually imposed and the effect of these sanctions is questionable.

Table 4 Sanctions against Parents by Province/Territory		
PROVINCE	COURT WITH JURISDICTION	SANCTIONS
Newfoundland	Provincial Court	Parent liable, upon conviction, for failure to enrol a child, to $25 each day the violation continues; for neglect or failure to cause child to attend school, to no more than $200 or imprisonment for no more than 30 days or both.
Prince Edward Island	Justice of the Peace	Parent liable, upon summary conviction, for neglect or failure to ensure child's attendance, to a fine of $50 or in default no more than 30 days imprisonment.
Nova Scotia	Family Court	Parent liable, upon summary conviction, for failure to cause child to attend, to not more than $10 for the first, $20 for the second, and $30 for every subsequent offence, or to no more than 30 days imprisonment in default.
New Brunswick	Provincial Court	Parent liable, upon summary conviction, for violation of the *Act* to a fine of no more than $20 or imprisonment of up to one day for each $10 in fines, or both, and for each subsequent offence, to a fine of no more than $40 or imprisonment of up to one day for each $10 in fines or both.
Quebec	No provision	No provision
Ontario	Provincial Court (Family Division) or Unified Family Court	Parent liable, upon summary conviction, for refusing or neglecting to cause child to attend school, to a fine of no more than $100, or to post bond of $200, or both.
Manitoba	Provincial Court	Parent liable, upon summary conviction, for failure, refusal or neglect to comply with notice of a child's absence, to a fine of no more than $500 or such other penalty as the court may deem proper. The court may require bond of $500 with sureties to ensure compliance with the notice.

Saskatchewan	Provincial Court	Parent liable for neglecting to discharge duty (of child's attendance) is subject, upon conviction, to a fine of $100, conditional upon the child's attendance. Anyone preventing or attempting to prevent pupil's attendance is liable, on conviction, to a fine of not more than $100.
Alberta	Attendance Board	Attendance Board was introduced in 1988 as a new approach for handling truancy, one that is based on remedies rather than criminal sanctions. The Attendance Board provides an alternative to the immediate use of the courts for the enforcement of compulsory attendance provisions of *The School Act*. The Attendance Board may impose on the student's parent a monetary penalty not exceeding $100 per day up to a maximum of $1,000 for each day the student does not attend school; or give such other directions considered appropriate to the circumstances.
British Columbia	No provision	No provision
Northwest Territories	Justice of the Peace	Parent liable, upon summary conviction, for failure to cause child to attend, to a fine of not more than $100. Any person who fails to give information or prevents or attempts to prevent the child's attendance, or who interferes, is liable to a fine of not more than $100.
Yukon	Justice of the Peace	Parent liable, upon conviction, for neglecting or refusing to take reasonable steps to cause a child to attend school, to a fine of not more than $100 and each day's continuance of such neglect constitutes a separate offence. Instead of imposing a fine, a judge may require the parent to give a bond or other security that the parent will cause the child to attend school.

Enforcement against Students

Again, differences are evident from province to province in enforcement of laws against truants. Except in the Yukon and British Columbia, legislation provides for some type of sanction against students who are habitually absent. These sanctions range from suspension from school as in Saskatchewan, to a directive to return to school accompanied by an attendance officer or counsellor as in Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Alberta, to referral to appropriate authorities as "a child in need of protection" as in legislation in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Alberta, to, upon conviction, fines and imprisonment as in Ontario. In Alberta, the Attendance Board established under *The School Act* has the authority to direct students to attend school, to take an education program, to report the matter to a director under *The Child Welfare Act*, or make other orders that the Attendance Board considers appropriate under the circumstances. (See Table 5.)

Table 5
Sanctions against Students

PROVINCE/ TERRITORY	COURT WITH JURISDICTION	SANCTIONS
Newfoundland	Family or Juvenile Court	Where a principal is satisfied that every effort has been made by a school or school board to secure the child's attendance as required, the principal shall report the child to the local superintendent. Every child enrolled in a school who is"habitually absent" from school and is beyond the control of the person caring for the child may be prosecuted under appropriate legislation.
Prince Edward Island	Supreme Court	Principal shall report a child who is "habitually absent" to the superintendent for referral to the Court as a child in need of protection.
Nova Scotia	Family Court	Where child is "habitually absent" or is absent five days or more within a 12-month period after date of warning notice to parents, or persistently violates the regulations of the school or who persistently misbehaves in a manner that renders him liable to exclusion from school, the attendance officer may refer child to Family Court. The court may adjourn for up to six months to refer child for examination, may order the child to attend school, or may order the parent or attendance officer to ensure the child's attendance, or it may do all of the above. The Court may ask for assessment regarding adjudication as a child in need of protection. The attendance officer has powers of a constable or peace officer.
New Brunswick	No provision	Child whose parents are unable to induce him or her to attend regularly: a) may be charged with being in violation of *The Child and Family and Family Relations Act*; and b) may be placed in protective care of the Minister of Social Services as a child whose security or development is in danger.
Quebec	Youth Court	Referral on finding that child's security or development is in danger.
Ontario	Provincial Court (Family Division) or Unified Family Court	A child who is required by law to attend school and who refuses to attend, or who is "habitually absent" is guilty of an offence and on conviction is liable to the penalties that were provided immediately before the 2nd day of

Ontario (cont.)		April, 1984, for children adjudged to be juvenile delinquents under the former *Juvenile Delinquents Act*. - governs procedures and penalties involving children (with regard to children 12 to 16). Unless the maximum specified for the offence is less, maximum penalties of $1,000 for proceedings commenced by information and $300 for proceedings commenced by certificate are provided. Identity of the child is protected. Probation orders are limited to one year. Imprisonment only for violation of court order.
Manitoba	No provision	The attendance officer may enter any place where children may be employed or where children congregate and take any child who should be at school, but who has been reported as being absent, to the school or to the child's home.
Saskatchewan	No provision	When pupil's attendance is "considered to be irregular under the policies of the board of education," suspensions are done in three stages: - up to three days;by the principal - four to ten days; by the principal, with approval of the director of education - more than ten days to a maximum of one year; by the board of education. A principal, upon receipt of attendance counsellor's report of irregular attendance, shall, in consultation with parent, consider what further action is to be taken. A local attendance counsellor has powers of a peace officer and can arrest and return pupil to home or school.
Alberta	An order has the same force and effect as if the order were an order of the Court of Queen's Bench	An attendance officer may send a student home or to school, make an *ex parte* application for an order requiring the student to comply with the directions of the attendance officer, and refer the matter to the Attendance Board. The Attendance Board may direct a student to attend school, direct the student to take an education program or course, and make other directions considered appropriate.
British Columbia	No provision	No provision
Northwest Territories	No provision	Where a child is absent four days in any month, the principal shall report absences to the local authority and to the school counsellor. A school counsellor may enter any place in which a child may be found or employed, enter a private residence with the permission of the occupant, and send the child to school and accompany him or her for that purpose.
Yukon	No provision	No provision

Table 6
Age Limits for Attending Kindergarten

PROVINCE/ TERRITORY	AGE AND GRADE	NUMBER OF INSTRUCTIONAL DAYS AND HOURS
Newfoundland	5 on or before December 31 Kindergarten	185 days Hrs: 2.5 a day Total instruc. hrs. a year - 462.5 No alternative approaches to organizing instructional time
Prince Edward Island	No kindergarten. 6 by January 31 of school year for grade 1	187 days Hrs: 4.75 a day grades 1-6 Total instruc. hrs. - 888.25
Nova Scotia	5 on or before October 1 Primary	No less than the product of 3 hrs a day times 187 days = 561 hrs Alt. approaches - alternate day plans and other schedules providing prescribed minimum total instr. time are permissible.
New Brunswick	5 on or before December 31 Kindergarten	187 days Hrs: 4 (including recess) Total instruc. hrs. = 691 min.-841.5 max. Full day (1.5 hrs after lunch)
Quebec	5 by October 1 Kindergarten (maternelle-5 ans) 4 by October 1 (maternelle-4 ans)	11 hrs and 45 mins per week Total instruc. hrs. - 36 x 11.75= 423 hrs. Half days or full five days. Varies for 4-year-olds
Ontario	5 by December 31 - Sr. K 4 by December 31 - Jr K.	188 days Hrs: 2.5 (inc. recess) (bd. dec.) Total instru. hrs - 2.25 x188=423 Alt. approaches - alternate full days or alternate full days/half days
Manitoba	5 by December 31 (leeway up to 30 days, board decision) Kindergarten	187 days Hrs.- 2.75 (inc. recess) Total instruc. hrs.- 2.5 x 187= 467.5 Half days or alternate full days
Saskatchewan	5 by December 31 (school board decision) Kindergarten	160-197 days Hrs: 2.5 (board decision) Total instruc. hrs - Min. 400 hours Alt. approaches - alternate full days
Alberta	5 (a year younger than 6 on September 1) Early Childhood Services	190-200 days Hrs: varies Total instruc. hrs. funded = 200 a year Alt. approaches - half days or alt. full days
British Columbia	5 by December 31 Kindergarten	184 days min. Hrs: 2 hrs. 24 mins. Total = 450. Flexibility in classes allowed Half days; full days for some (ESL, spec. need, on request)
Yukon	4 years 8 mos by September 1 Kindergarten	190 days Hrs: 2.5 a day. Varies from community to community (board decision) Total instruc. hrs.- 2.5 x190-7.5 non-inst. = 467.7 Alt. approaches - Alternate full days
Northwest Territories	5 on or before December 31 Kindergarten	190 days Hrs: 3 max. (board decision) Total instruct. hrs:- 3 x 190= 570

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